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ABSTRACT

During the 1980s Florida has mandated several testing programs to improve the quality of the community college, state university, and teacher education entrants and graduates. Three measures were intended to improve the quality of community college/state university/teacher education students. The College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) program requires minimum basic skills achievement for graduation from a community college or entrance to upper division university programs. In addition to the CLAST testing, a minimum SAT/ACT score is required for entrance to state-approved teacher education programs. Finally, under the Beginning Teacher Program students must complete the Florida Teacher Certification Examination before a five-year certificate is granted. As a result of these testing requirements, students have been refused admittance to teacher education programs, graduation has been delayed, and state-approved teacher education programs may be placed on probation with their accreditation in jeopardy. This paper discusses each of these programs, their requirements, results, and impact on teacher education. (JD)

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The Impact of State Mandated Testing on Teacher Education in Florida

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Introduction

During the 80's Florida has mandated several testing programs to improve the quality of community college, state university, and teacher education entrants and graduates. Two measures were intended to improve the quality of community college/state university/teacher education students. The CLAST program requires minimum basic skills achievement for graduation from a community college or entrance to upper division university programs. In addition to the CLAST testing, a minimum SAT/ACT score is required for entrance to state-approved teacher education programs. Finally the Beginning Teacher Program includes basic skills testing within the first year of teaching. As a result of these testing requirements, students have been refused admittance to teacher education programs, graduation has been delayed, and state-approved teacher education programs may be placed on probation with their accreditation in jeopardy. We will discuss each of these programs, their requirements, results, and impact on teacher education.

College Level Academic Skills Test

One mandated test that applies to all community college students and upper-division university students in the state of Florida is the College Level Academic Skills Test, hereafter referred to as the CLAST. The CLAST is an achievement test that was developed to ensure that students have acquired basic communication and computation skills by the end of the sophomore year. These subskills are measured by four

subtests - reading, writing, computation, and essay. The reading, writing, and computation subtests are objective. The essay is scored holistically on a scale of 1-8.

Three subtests are intended to measure specific skills. The reading subtest measures 10 specific skills. Examples of skills tested are recognizing main idea, distinguishing between fact and opinion, and drawing inferences and conclusions. The writing subtest covers 19 specific skills. Examples include determining a purpose for writing, using parallel expressions for parallel ideas, and using standard spelling, punctuation and capitalization. The computation subtest is divided into four sections: algorithms, concepts, generalizations, and problem solving. A total of 50 specific subskills are tested on the computation test.

The CLAST takes 4 1/2 hours to administer. It is given three times a year, in September, March and June, at all community colleges and state universities. Students must pass all four subtests in order to receive the AA degree or to enroll in upper-division courses. The community colleges are making curriculum changes in order to increase students' chances of passing the CLAST. At one community college, these changes include an additional required math course and more writing across the curriculum; for example, writing essays in social science, behavioral science, and humanities instead of writing only in English classes.

Because it is fairly new, the CLAST entry requirement into upper-division courses is not strictly enforced. Students are not able to graduate, however, unless they have passed all four subtests. There is also a provision for passing three subtests that allows students to

take 36 uppper-division hours, but they still must pass all four subtests before graduating.

Standards for passing the CLAST are going to be increased gradually. Under the present standards, the percentage of students who passed at the Florida State Universities are as follows:

University of Florida	93.4%
University of Central Florida	91.2
University of North Florida	90.5
Florida State University	90.2
University of South Florida	89.3
University of West Florida	85.4
Florida Atlantic University	83.7
Florida International University	73.5
Florida A&M University	59.6

The present standards will be increased in August, 1986 and then again in August, 1989. Passing scores are as follows:

	Reading	Writing	Computation	Essay
8/1/84-7/31/86	260	265	260	4
8/1/86-7/31/89	270	270	275	4
8/1/89	295	295	295	5

An example of the kind of effect this raise in standards may have on teacher education programs follows. There are currently 27 students in one junior internship program. Of those 27, 13 have taken the CLAST and have met the standards for passing. Of those 13, 1 would not meet the 1986 standards and 7 would not meet the 1989 standards. All of those 13 had met SAT/ACT requirements in order to be in the internship program.

The result of requiring students to pass the CLAST appears to be a raised consciousness of what students are learning and the actual skills they possess. In addition, the CLAST requirement may produce two specific effects: a decrease in enrollment and/or an increase in the quality of skills students possess. It will very likely have an effect on enrollment, particularly for community college transfer students. Before the CLAST requirement, community college graduates with AA degrees were automatically accepted as juniors at the state universities. It is too early to draw any conclusions, especially since the requirement is not being strictly enforced as an entry requirement; however, elementary education degrees awarded at one state university dropped 29% in 1985. CLAST requirements went into efect August, 1984. It appears that degrees awarded dropped after that point, but it is too early to tell whether a cause/effect relationship exists. It is hoped that the second effect, students would come into the program better prepared as freshmen and sophomores, will be more prevalent.

SAT/ACT Requirements

Another of the attempts of the Florida Legislature to raise teacher quality resulted in a minimum SAT or ACT score requirement for entrance into state-approved teacher education programs. An SAT score of 835 or an ACT score of 17 was established as the minimum; however, at some universities this requirement was interpreted in such a way that students were enrolled in courses without being formally admitted to the professional state-approved program. At the authors' university, for example, students were not fully admitted to the professional phase

of the teacher education programs until they applied for and were admitted to the first structured field-based experience.

The SAT/ACT scores required for entrance into this student teaching phase reduced, somewhat, the numbers of students participating in the experience; however, the magnitude of the impact was impossible to assess accurately, for at least two reasons. First, there were prerequisite courses to the student teaching experiences that some students did not complete satisfactorily, and this prevented these students from continuing into the professional phase. Second, there were other legislative-mandated requirements enacted about the same time that had a confounding impact on teacher education program enrollments.

Students without the SAT/ACT minimum score were permitted, nonetheless, to enroll in other courses that were approximately equivalent to two semesters of full-time work. These were courses that could be taken at any time during the program. This interpretation of the SAT/ACT requirement, therefore, resulted in many students' being able to maintain enrollment in the College of Education while repeating the SAT or ACT.

Along with the CLAST, the SAT/ACT requirements were effective in helping raise academic standards in Florida colleges of education particularly for transfer students from community colleges. As mentioned previously, a state mandate provides students with AA degrees from Florida institutions automatic admission to the junior level of the state universities. This, in effect, admitted them to colleges of education even though they may not have met the college's specific entrance requirements.

It should be noted that there was a provision in the legislation that allowed each college of education to admit students whose scores did not meet the SAT/ACT minimum, as long as these students did not exceed 10% of the college's enrollment in the professional phase. Our university consistently used this 10% rule to admit students who were very close to the required cutoff scores.

Unlike most state institutions, we did not employ the 10% rule as a vehicle to increase minority student enrollments. In fact, students were ranked according to the combined test score/GPA factor and selected, down the ranking, until the 10% number was met. This resulted in two situations, one positive and one negative. On the positive side, students with ACT's of 6 and 7 who applied for admisssion were turned away from the teacher education program. On the negative side, however, the enrollment of minority students remained small.

While the 10% rule has not been applied similarly in all state universities, overall the legislative mandate for SAT/ACT testing has resulted in a broader enforcement of minimum entrance requirements for state-approved teacher education programs.

Florida Teacher Certification Examination

Under the Beginning Teacher Program in Florida, teacher education students who graduate from state-approved programs no longer receive automatic regular certification. Instead they receive a temporary certificate and must complete the Florida Teacher Certification Examination (FTCE) and satisfactorily fulfill the detailed requirements of the first year teaching program. Only then is a regular five-year certificate granted. These requirements also apply to all applicants

for initial certification whether from Florida or out-of-state, as well as all Florida certified teachers who have let their certificates expire. Thus the examination requirement is quite inclusive.

The FTCE consists of four parts: writing, reading, mathematics, and professional education. It takes an entire day (8:00 AM to 4:00 PM on a Saturday) and is scheduled three times a year at 15 different locations throughout the state. Special arrangements can be made for handicapped examinees or those with religious conflicts on the examination dates.

A brief description of the four subtests follows. Writing is a 45 minute essay written on a general topic and is holistically scored by three judges. The reading subtest is a multiple choice cloze-type test using content from general education textbooks, journals, and state publications. Both the mathematics and professional education subtests are in traditional multiple choice format, with the mathematics a basic skills test requiring simple computation and the solution of real world problems. The areas of academic and social development, classroom management, evaluation, materials, objectives, and exceptional student education make up the professional portion of the examination. A two-hour period is allotted for reading and mathematics combined, with 2/1/2 hours for professional education.

Beginning teachers must eventually pass all four sections of the examination. Examinees who fail one or more sections may retake those sections at a later date; however, only three temporary certificates can be issued. If the first temporary certificate was issued after July 1, 1981, a passing score on reading, writing, and mathematics and

a score on the professional education subtests is needed for a second temporary certificate. A third certificate can then be issued with another score on the professional section but a fourth temporary certificate is not allowed. Since no one is allowed to teach in Florida without at least a temporary certificate, the passing score requirement on the three basic skills subtests does keep some beginning teachers from continuing.

The requirements for those whose first temporary certificate was issued prior to July 1981 are more lenient. Only new scores each time on any failed subtests are necessary for a second or third certificate, but once again only three temporary certificates can be issued.

The cut-off points for passing each subtest have been set at quite low levels since testing started in 1981; however, for the October, 1985 testing the cut-off levels were increased. October, 1985 score reports indicated that 79% of the teacher candidates taking the test for the first time passed all four sections. This compares to 78% for June, 1985 and 83% in October, 1984, both of which were at the lower passing levels. The difficulty in balancing increasing standards of competency with minority hiring goals can be seen in the minority test results. In October 1985, 34% of the black and 48% of the Hispanic candidates passed all four sections of the test on the first attempt.

Newspaper comments from the general public and editorial opinions have been critical regarding the easy level of the test items, particularly in mathematics. Sample questions similar to those which have been printed in the press are:

1. Find the sum of 3,905, 66 and 821.
2. Harmony Hills School District intends to give a 9% cost-of-

living raise to its teachers. If the base pay for a beginning teacher with a Master's Degree is presently $10,500, determine what the base pay will be after the raise has gone into effect.

3. During a flu epidemic one-third of the 480 students at Jones Elementary School were absent. If three-fifths of the absent students had the flu, how many students were absent because of the flu?

The law also includes accountability for the teacher education institutions with state-approved programs. A minimum of 80% of the graduates from each program must pass the examination for the institution to retain state approval of the program.

When results of the early testings were sent to the colleges and universities, many programs fell below the 80% passing rate. This was particularly true of programs with small numbers of students. On any particular testing date, small programs may have only one or two students taking the test. If one student fails one portion of the examination, the program would be in jeopardy. Several programs throughout the state were threatened with loss of state-approved programs. Because of appeals, no actual enforcement of the 80% requirement has taken place to date. The Department of Education recently announced that the 80% minimum for state-approved programs will be applied to combined test results for the 1982-1985 period. Neither individual testing date nor annual test results will be used; rather only three year totals will determine continued program eligibility.

At this time teacher education institutions have not received any testing results other than for single test administrations or one year totals. At our university, several programs with small enrollments appear to be in difficulty although extending the figures through more testings will make program disapprovals less likely.

The most recent score report also provides information on the SAT/ACT scores of the examinees. Florida institution's can accept 10% provisional students who do not meet the score requirements, and also there are some students who entered the program before SAT/ACT scores were required. At one university, there were 38 examinee scores with failures in one or more sections. Of these, 14 had no SAT/ACT score, 14 had scores below the required level and only 10 had acceptable SAT/ACT scores. Thus the SAT/ACT score does appear to identify many students who have difficulty with the teacher certification examination.

To summarize, the Florida Teacher Certification Examination is starting to require a minimum level of basic skills and professional education competency for newly certified teachers in Florida. The requirements do affect a disproportionate number of minority examinees. The accountability requirement for teacher education programs has not as yet been enforced and its future impact is unknown. As the requirement is now interpreted, it is likely that some state-approved programs will be in jeopardy after the 1982-1985 test results are reported.

All three legislatively mandated testing programs are raising standards for teachers in Florida. Requirements for students entering teacher education programs and teachers entering the profession have been increased via entrance and exit examinations. In addition,

accountability for achievement levels of program graduates are being monitored. The long range effects of all these requirements will not be apparent for some time; but for the present, some students are no longer eligible to enter or graduate from state-approved programs, and some teacher education programs will likely lose their state-approved status.